1: Melamid K-4 (no date) 1953 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4
Qatar MK3

POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF TRUCIAL 'OMAN AND QATAR

ALEXANDER MELAMID

Q 178 T 178

UNTIL the 1930's pirating, slave trading, and arms smuggling were the occupations of the native population on the southeast shores of the Persian Gulf, and they largely determined the status of the region in international affairs. Since then the oil industry, with its manifold economic and political aspects, has begun to replace these earlier "trades." The effect of this change offers an unusual insight into the evolution of states and their territorial and maritime sovereignty. Despite the present importance of the Persian Gulf in world affairs, information on Trucial 'Oman, and to a smaller extent on Qatar, is scarce and contradictory.

The Physical and Historical Background

Q 133 T 193

Physically, the south coast of the Persian Gulf is uninviting. Shallow waters with dangerous reefs fringe the beaches, and the bars across the mouths of the many inlets and coastal creeks make them inaccessible to the smallest ocean-going vessels. The shore line forms the margin of a low, undulating plateau with a surface of sand or loose stones, which merges to the south into the even less hospitable and little-known desert of the Rub' al Khali. Occasionally the plateau is interrupted by shallow salt pans or by insignificant hills that may expose the bedrock, mainly Eocene limestone. There are no continuous wadies, or any other marked features. The low northern extension of the mountains of 'Oman, which terminates in the rugged and deeply indented peninsula of Masandam, forms the eastern boundary of the region. Rainfall is estimated at less than five inches a year, falling in a few winter showers. Temperatures on the coast are high: averages range from the high sixties in January to the nineties in July. Humidity is also high. Because of the oppressive summer weather, the oil company operating in Qatar suspends the work of its seismographic exploration crews from May to November. However, the humidity does not penetrate far into the interior, and exploratory activities in, for example, the neighboring inland oil fields of Saudi Arabia continue throughout the year.

Q 132 T 132 Q 3N

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The vegetation is scanty. Economically useful plants that grow without irrigation can feed only camels, sheep, and goats. Aside from a stable kept by the sheikh of Ajman, no horses are reported anywhere, and even the number of cattle is small.

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2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

of oil exploitation, have visited the interior of Central Arabia and the coastal regions of Basra, Kuwait, or the Hedjaz. The independent principalities of Oman, however, and the vast desert of Rub-al-Khali to the south-west, are not so well known. Large tracts of this region, several hundred square miles in extent, have never been traversed. Not only no European, but, in some cases, no Arab, has trod their lonely sands. St. John Philby, who describes his experiences with Scriptural clarity in *The Empty Quarter*, did indeed cross the Rub-al-Khali from Dhufar to Qatar, but since this vast desert is almost a thousand miles wide, his remarkable journey cannot be regarded as adding more than a fragment to our minute knowledge of this 'lost world'. Since then, Allied pilots and, in one instance, Italians who set out from Eritrea to bomb Bahrein and Abadan but who never returned to their base, have flown over the Rub-al-Khali and have contributed some valuable reconnaissance photographs and survey records, but the desert from Salala to Muscat and from Muscat to Bahrein still holds secrets which may possibly remain untold for a century from now.

The region known as Oman lies in south-east Arabia between the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. In area it is about the size of Ireland. The inhabited portion extends from the Oman sultanate, north of Muscat, to the Tafurah desert in the west. The fort which was my headquarters at Sharjah, a small inland principality, was situated in what is known as the Trucial Oman Coast.

One normally thinks of the desert as being one vast expanse of sand, rather like the sandy plains of North Africa. In Oman this monotony of landscape is not so prevalent. From Ras-al-Khaimah, on the northern shore, to Muscat in the south, there runs a chain of mountains, in places fifty miles wide, with peaks rising to 8,000 feet. Mostly volcanic, they are composed of black basalt, igneous rocks and red sandstone, the different stratæ forming a picturesque *mise-en-scène* when viewed from the distance. Inland, especially in the winter months, the wadhis become foaming torrents and in the valleys the land is clothed in tender green; frankincense and acacia trees, broom and scented clover, yield a fragrance equal to the sweetest perfume of violets in a Devon lane. Then, scattered through this region in the vicinity of the wells, are large date plantations and village gardens verdant with pomegranate and fig trees. Even the desert itself could scarcely be termed barren, for it is mostly covered with various species of shrub and low, sap-filled plants of the stone-crop order. I have seen the most arid parts

suddenly merge into green as one walked over the sands, and come upon a copse of tamarisk and camel thorn, with moss and grass and occasionally a type of dandelion, growing in their shade.

To obtain a glimpse of this infinite variety of the desert, one should fly over it at two thousand feet. From this height one has an ideal panorama in which are focused mountain peaks of changing colour, shallow seas of pale jade green, and sands that vary from golden yellow to blood red.

My own entry into Arabia was by air. After two days' flight from Poole, with night-stops at Cairo and Bahrein Island, our Short Sunderland flying-boat crossed the Persian Gulf through thundery cumulus clouds and flew three hundred miles direct to Dubai, a busy town ten miles south-west of Sharjah. The mountains suddenly gave way to a long, narrow creek, and we skimmed the low-walled town to make a smooth landing between the marker buoys. From the air the open-roofed houses looked as though they had been bombed, the shadows giving the sharp relief of inked-in squares. The gardens of the merchants were gay with feathery palms, and in the creek and harbour scores of dhows, with awnings of palm-matting, lazily skimmed the surface.

Our four-engined aircraft was speedily moored to the buoy—an operation requiring some dexterity on the part of the first officer, who has to hook the ring at the top of the buoy as the aircraft slowly taxies up to it; if he misses, the flying-boat has to make a second circuit or else taxi to another buoy. The passenger launch was already half-way across the creek, with the sun-bronzed coxswain at the wheel. He was a Scot who had spent two years in the desert and had never had a day's illness. The clean lines and trim condition of the launch were impressive, as were the Arab serangs, clad in blue jerseys and wearing piratical caps, who stood in the stern like guardsmen. The engines were reversed to enable the launch to glide slowly under the wing, and careful hands grasped the flying-boat's hull to prevent bumping. The door was opened and as soon as the traffic officer had clambered aboard with his papers and diplomatic mail, we were ushered aboard the launch. Happily, there were none of the usual port formalities, for at Dubai there are no immigration, customs or passport requirements for air travellers.

As we chugged away from our silver-painted craft towards the tiny stone pier, I felt that we had suddenly drifted into another world—a world of azure, cloudless skies, pellucid green water, and soft,

2: O'Shea -G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

of a car, or use so much petrol (ten gallons each way). A comparable trip would be to take a car straight across Dartmoor, ignoring all roads and tracks, and going ahead through bracken, fells and over the tors. Such a journey could not possibly harm a car more than this trip to Ras-al-Khaimah. In the few roads shown on a large-scale military map of Oman, that to Ras-al-Khaimah is not indicated, although a few inter-related camel tracks are shown. Yet, in ways other than those connected with motoring, it is one of the most interesting journeys I have made in that part of Arabia.

Two vehicles were requisitioned for the journey; a 15-cwt., four-wheeled drive, Western Desert battle-wagon, belonging to the R.A.F. (and known for some inexplicable reason as a 'fish and chip' wagon by the troops), and a Ford V-8 brake or station wagon. Neither was in an exemplary state, the ignition system of the truck being notoriously erratic, while the station wagon, which belonged to the Fort, had just returned from the workshops after a major overhaul. Both were still convalescent and uncertain on their wheels, but they were the only transport we could procure. All our supplies had to come by sea, new vehicles were impossible to obtain, whilst spares were very grudgingly released by Headquarters after a lengthy exchange of vituperous correspondence.

The party consisted of eight: S/Ldr. Percy Cranley, the Officer Commanding the R.A.F. Unit; myself; the Medical Officer (F/Lt. Cargill); the Station Engineer (Sparkes); the Station Coxswain (Jock Frew); the Radio Officer (Stanton); the Junior Coxswain (Canteenwallah); the Khan Sahib Hussein, Agent for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company; and Suleman Beg, our driver.

After an early breakfast, we set off at seven o'clock, with the station wagon leading. We picked up the Khan Sahib at his residence in Sharjah and set off in a north-easterly direction left of the Sheikh's Wells, where we met the other vehicle. For the first ten miles the journey was uninteresting, consisting of a soft sand-track in which our wheels slithered continuously, making steering very difficult. There was no vegetation to speak of, apart from the ever-present scrub and desert stonecrop, with occasional clumps of *ashgar*, a poisonous plant with broad, greyish leaves, from which the Arabs make an inferior gunpowder, since it contains saltpetre. A speed greater than twelve miles an hour was not possible at this stage of the journey, but shortly after eight o'clock we left the sand-hills and entered a tract of hard, smooth desert which spread, flat and interminable, for twenty miles or so.

000 The cars were running fairly well, but the glare from the sun was very trying to the eyes, in spite of tinted glasses. The roofs of the cars became so hot that the paint on the surface bubbled, and inside it was suffocating. We made a halt after about thirty miles' hard driving, had a smoke, and a drink from our tea flasks. To the north of us there shimmered what appeared to be a vast lake. I started to walk towards it and it gradually receded, turning out to be, as I had suspected, a perfect mirage, with waves and even a thin line of breakers on the shore. When I reached the spot where the 'lake' had been, I noticed, on looking down at the ground, that it sparkled as if covered with minute crystals. The surface was whiter than that of the surrounding desert, and I found that it consisted of a thin layer or crust of salt, intermingled with silica. A slice about six inches in diameter, and an eighth of an inch thick, was easily levered off and inspected by the company. I had literally succeeded in taking a piece of mirage in my hands. In case the scientifically-minded should quibble over this theory, I hasten to add that, although these saline-silica crystals undoubtedly caused this particular mirage, I should hesitate to ascribe all mirages as being due to the same cause. Others may possibly be due to high-frequency radiation of solar light waves striking the earth and being reflected back, and viewed from a favourable angle by the spectator.

133 The sand-plain[1] which we were now traversing, which was composed of sun-baked mud, showed signs of having been flooded at high-tide; it soon gave way to soft sandhills, and we rocked and swayed along for several miles until at last we reached the shore. Fortunately the tide was far out and, by creeping under the low cliffs, we contrived to keep our wheels out of the soft mud. A sandbank rose out of the cobalt sea until it formed a gleaming white spit of land, forming a narrow creek, on the far side of which [361] stood out mistily the little town of Umm-al-Quain. The circular watch-towers, plaster houses and white-walled palace of the sheikh looked fairy-like in the morning sunlight. A white-sailed dhow swept gracefully down the creek and the fronds of the date palms swayed in the light breeze.

137 Before us the road swept suddenly into a sharp gradient and we entered the long, green valley of Hadaithah. Here, in startling contrast to the arid desert we had left behind us, the vegetation was lush and plentiful. Spring had come early to the valley and even the insipid neam trees (a species of acacia) had a verdant, pristine

1 [Between Sharjah and Ras-al-Khaimah--Analyst]

beauty in their wiry branches and finely serrated leaves. In their shade the grasses grew tall and vivid, while around were masses of small yellow flowers which resembled the wild marguerite. 137

We had gone only a few miles when the station wagon broke down, necessitating a stop for repairs. While the engineer poked his head under the bonnet, I took a stroll in the valley and climbed the high sandbanks in order to observe the vegetation more closely. To my surprise, I found several varieties of flowers common to the English countryside growing in profusion in this wilderness. According to the notes I made at the time there were white campions, vetch, broom (the flowers were smaller than ours and lacking in perfume), sorrel, dandelion, convolvulus, a small yellow flower which resembled 'Old Lady's Slipper', and camel-grass; the last-named having a segmented stalk and spear-like leaves not unlike bamboo, of which it may be a distant relative. This grass grew to a height of nearly four feet.

There were also clumps of *ashgar*, the rubbery-leaved bush which exudes a highly-poisonous sap, and whose dark purple flowers have a passionate, poppy-like beauty. The sandy ground was full of burrows made by rock lizards, rabbits and desert rats, though I saw none of these animals on this stage of the journey. Locusts and grasshoppers were plentiful, and I saw several Red Admiral, Tortoiseshell and Comma butterflies, also a large black ant marked with white spots, with elongated legs which raised its body an eighth of an inch above the ground. 136

The engine repaired, we drove on for another twenty miles, until the granite ridges of Ruus-al-Jibal came into sight. This range of hills, which stretches from the northernmost tip of the peninsula to as far south as Muscat, varies in height from 2,000 to 8,000 feet. Commanders of aircraft using this route have assured me, however, that the latter figure is an error, and that the maps are incorrectly marked. The mountains looked blue in the distance, as all mountains do, but as we approached them the dark patches became honey-coloured cliffs, and the light sweeps turned into ridges and plateaux of variegated strata. As mountains go, they are not beautiful in the æsthetic Alpine sense, yet there is a certain grandeur about their irregular peaks and the ragged angles of the cliffs. The violet and pink slopes were most soothing to our desert-tired eyes. 133

In an unexpected dip in the valley we came upon a herd of camels grazing on the tender thorn leaves; there were about six calves 233

directly it shows signs of dying. I was told that they will follow a sick donkey for miles, circling lazily in the air and greedily awaiting the moment when the animal will totter to its knees and slowly expire.

A patriarchal-looking Arab in a brown silk *abbas* came towards us and greeted the Khan Sahib with affection. He told us that he belonged to the retinue of the Sheikh Raschid, who was camping in the hills nearby. Apparently the sheikh was on a hunting expedition and had shot several gazelle and *houbari*, the lesser bustard. We declined his invitation to take coffee with the sheikh, as this would have meant a delay of at least an hour, and time was pressing; so he gave us very exact instructions for finding the road to Mahrid. This meant crossing a wadhi, where the ground was still soggy and uncertain for heavy vehicles, but with luck and good driving we crossed it without mishap. A grubby Arab boy appeared from behind a neam tree and, jumping on our running board, insisted on showing us the way; we did not begrudge him the lift and, as it transpired, he really was helpful.

The way meandered through a field of perfumed clover, a small-leaved variety with tiny yellow flowers. The scent was reminiscent of mimosa and was so strong as to be almost overwhelming. Hundreds of bees, attracted by the smell, filled the still air with their murmuring. The Arabs collect large quantities of honey from this district, and it is all made from the scented clover-pollen. The mountains now loomed titanically above us, grim and lowering, and ten miles to the west we could see the spires and towers of Ras-al-Khaimah reflected in the clear blue waters of the creek.

At the foot of the hills the softer green of the grass was shaded by dark avenues of neam trees, plantations of date palms, and the summer gardens of the wealthier residents. We had eight miles to go before we reached Mahrid, and it was already noon. We felt hungry and thirsty, and longed for the cool veranda of the Khan Sahib's house, with prospects of sherbet, *haloua* and cheese. At that moment—such is the perversity of life—our truck gave a convulsive cough and refused to budge further. A quick inspection by our driver revealed that we had run out of petrol.

No course was open to us other than to alight from the overheated vehicle, light pipes or cigarettes, and sit down to talk the situation over. We had a faint inkling of how the Army at Tobruk and Marble Arch must have felt in a similar predicament, only with Messerschmitts and Junkers zooming overhead, and how they

[Near Mahrid -- Analyst]

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A fine clump of acacia, or neam trees, at Umm-al-Quwain. Called *gharf* by the Arabs, they provide a good shade for men and cattle, and are a sign of underground water

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2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

000 of the war, when certain types of aircraft were unreliable and pilots inexperienced in desert conditions. A hundred yards away, on a hill surrounded by barbed wire, was the English cemetery. Here, a dozen little white wooden crosses marked the last resting places of men who would never again see the green fields and lanes of Kent or Yorkshire. Overhead, in the hard blue sky, the vultures soared and on the rocks the lizards scurried from the shadows of their wings.

A rough track in the sand led to the tower; it had been made by American trucks, the drivers of which had been hunting gazelle 712 or houbari, the wild bustard. The tower,[1] which was about sixty feet high, was built of large stones cemented together with *juss*, the local mortar. Situated on the highest part of the sandhill, a view of at least twenty miles could be obtained from the crenellated top. At dusk the sheikh's Askhari guards would take their stand beside a little peep-hole in the walls, on the look-out for any raiders who might venture into Sharjah territory. In the daytime a round boulder, cunningly camouflaged with rags to look like a human head, would be affixed to the battlemented top, and the effect of this simple deception was most realistic. For several weeks I was convinced that an Arab sentry was on guard there, even when I inspected it through Zeiss field-glasses, and it was only when I climbed the tower with one of the sheikh's sons that I discovered the trick. These towers are a regular feature of every Arab town in Oman, and one sees scores of them dotted all over the landscape, looking rather like old Norfolk mills without their sails.

133 A high ridge of dunes rises gradually behind the tower, and 137 from the top of these one has an amazing view of the distant mountains. Gilded by the late afternoon sun, the peaks and passes assume changing colours, varying from deep purple to misty violet and terra-cotta pink. The desert beyond the dunes changes in character, due probably to the presence of subterranean streams, and one finds miniature *wadhis* and *nullahs* luxuriant with neam copses, and mossy banks where lush grass grows between tiny desert daisies and dandelions. In these banks I have found clumps of those edible fungi, the *fagar* and *tartuth*, both Arab delicacies, bushes of wild berries, and stunted thorn trees called, I believe, Spici Christi.

136 Unfortunately my knowledge of botany and zoology is abysmally limited, and I was unable to identify many species which were unfamiliar to me; as a scientific record of wild life in the Gulf

1 - [The Sheikh's watch-tower 5 miles east of Sharjah]

136 Locusts, of course, are the commonest insects of the desert next to flies, and the Anti-Locust Commission despatched to Oman by the Middle East Supply Organization has helped very greatly in their extermination by poisoning their breeding places. Dragon-flies, larger than the English species, though less colourful, are common in the winter months, as are the red admiral, comma and tortoiseshell butterflies. Of ants, the soldier may be found in date plantations; otherwise the only other species I have seen is the black ant, equal in size to the English wood ant. Beetles are numerous, the most conspicuous being the black scarab, a fascinating creature to watch as it rolls little balls of dung along the sand.

• 137 Close to the watch-tower there is a little dell where tamarisk trees flourish for no apparent reason; their roots are exceedingly long, since each year they plunge further into the sand in search of water. My Indian gardener, Toni, attempted to dig one of these up as I thought it would look attractive if re-planted in front of the Fort. He found the task impossible; although the bush was barely five feet in height, the roots were still uncovered when he had excavated to a depth of seven feet. Anything seems to grow in this dell, from cinquefoil to ashkar plants, and I considered it would make an excellent flower and vegetable garden.

000 The Sheikh of Sharjah gave permission for me to cultivate the area, but when I explained to headquarters that, in order to grow vegetables in a satisfactory manner, at least twenty wells would have to be dug, six Indian gardeners employed, and a five-foot wall erected to keep out thieves and stray donkeys, the matter was discreetly shelved. A garden is possible in the desert, as has been proved at the Sheikh's Wells and in the Fort, but only at considerable expense. At present it is cheaper to send fresh vegetables to Sharjah by air, since they occupy little space in an aircraft.

137 Wild vegetation is sparse, except in the valleys, and consists mostly of scrub, a variety of stonecrop (whose stems contain reservoirs of fresh water), tamarisk, ashkar, and a grey, harsh-leafed, spiky plant I failed to identify. The desert is a paradise for rock-garden enthusiasts, and one finds many varieties of miniature plants, each with its tiny, star-shaped blooms of pink, white or yellow. After the rains grass comes up suddenly in hollows or beneath the neam trees, and the damp top soil is often covered with mushrooms, truffles, orchids and desert lilies. The desert truffle is a long-stemmed fleshy plant, shaped like a fat drum

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stick, with a pink, cone-like tip. This plant, together with its black roots, is much favoured by the Arabs as a delicacy. More unexpected was the discovery of a solitary orchid, with red and yellow flowers spotted with black, in shape and size resembling a hyacinth. I did not see another specimen during the whole time I was in Arabia.

After the bare, flat desert which surrounded the Fort it was a pleasant relief to glimpse this panorama of small *wadhis*, clumps of feathery acacia and neam trees and the wig-like camel thorn. Here the desert surges like a green and brown sea, until it meets the mountains of the Shamailiyah at the horizon, the peaks of which look deceptively closer than their seventy miles. Herds of camel and gazelle graze peacefully at the scrub, and flocks of bustard settle in the hollows; in a little gulley, between the roots of two large neam trees, I saw a small, honey-coloured fox emerge from his hole. At sunset one can hear the eerie call of the wild dog, whilst nearer to the mountains the grey wolf hunts in packs and creates havoc amongst the Bedouins' flocks of goats and sheep.

Mr. Williamson, a geologist employed by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, told me that he had shot a leopard in the mountains; but I never saw one myself and believe they are extremely rare in Oman. The commonest marsupial of all, of course, is the cheeky little desert rat, with its bat-like ears and long kangaroo legs.

One evening the Khan Bahadur drove me over to his garden at the Sheikh's Wells. It consists of about an acre of sandy ground with concrete channels for irrigation. A power-pump has been installed, but is not working, and the gardeners obtain water from the wells by means of buckets attached to long ropes. The garden is shaded by palm trees, fig trees, pomegranates, zinnas, cotton trees, limes, acacias and a tall maple species known as ticoma. The soil has been well manured and is fertile, producing excellent marrows, onions, brinjals (ladies' fingers), pumpkins, radishes and gherkins. Adjoining this garden some of the villagers have their own smallholding. We used to supply them with vegetable seeds, and, in return for their labour in growing the plants, we offered to buy the produce at slightly less than the market price. Needless to say, nothing ever came up! Each garden is about an acre in extent, and is divided into about twenty sections, each of which belongs to a smallholder; there is a well to every four sections.

Although I paid frequent visits to Captain Bird's official residence

sailed it across the Gulf single-handed, landed at Jask at night and, eluding the Persian guards, crept into the offices. He made several trips back and forth in this manner, carrying armfuls of files, books, papers and records. Finally he set fire to the huts and ran down to the shore under fire from the sentries' rifles. Abdul returned in safety to Sharjah and presented the Station Manager with about half a ton of 'bumph' for which he had risked his life. If there were such a thing as a Civil Servant's Medal I feel sure old Abdul is entitled to it.

I decided to spend the following week as a convalescent, and handed over my principal duties to McGilvray, the red-headed South African Traffic Officer. One afternoon, when a Sunderland flying-boat was due to make a landing at Dubai, I decided to accompany the party. It was a hot and uncomfortable drive, but it was cool inside the rest-house and Haider soon made us iced tea with lemon, and produced some delicious sausage-rolls. We were just building a small control tower on the roof, and it was pleasant to climb to the top and sit in a deck chair; there was invariably a fresh sea breeze on the roof, and one had a magnificent view of the distant mountains at Ras-al-Khaimah, seventy miles away and of the blue-green creek and the town of Dubai beyond.

Whilst the flying-boat discharged its passengers I wandered along the creek shore and picked up some fine specimens of shells, including mother-o'-pearl, and pieces of branch-like coral. This coral is pure white and delicately perforated, resembling Honiton lace; sometimes pink mollusc shells are found adhering to it, and these are used by the Arabs as pin trays. The shore is littered with rocks, garbage, bones and refuse from the boats, and occasionally one comes across the carcase of a donkey. Hundreds of crabs dart into their mud-holes as one approaches, and the rocks swarm with tiny lizards of a peculiar grey colour. It is surprising to find flowers growing amongst the decayed sea-wrack, but I have dug up several sea poppies and desert lilies—a yellow-flowered plant resembling a hyacinth—which were successfully transplanted in the Fort garden.

I watched the flying-boat take off on its long journey to Karachi, and joined the coxswain and the others at the end of the little jetty. Jock asked me if I would like a trip down the creek to Dubai in the launch, so we crowded into the small vessel and began to chug down-stream at a pleasant twelve knots. Dubai is a much more attractive town than Sharjah, and about twice as large; palm and

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

seaport famous to mariners for its watch-towers which guard the hills behind the town, we forked right and drove along the main caravan route to Falaj-al-'Ali, which is rather rough and tortuous.

The first ten miles beyond Umm-al-Quwain were monotonous, a flat expanse of brownish grey desert, unrelieved by the slightest elevation. We were above sea-level, but the high dunes behind the town obscured all but a shimmer of blue horizon. Later we entered a *batah*, a depression or valley resembling the *Jiri* at Ras-al-Khaimah. This valley, some ten miles long, between terraces of steep sandhills, was luxuriant with acacia trees, both of the *gharf* (flat-topped) and *sumr* (tall) varieties; there were also species of furze and broom, bamboo grass, *abal* and *ashgar* bushes, camel thorn and the thorny *Spici Christi*.

It was astonishingly green, rather like an English glade, so that one half expected to find violets and primroses growing under the clumps of *neam* trees. Water must have been plentiful here, for we saw numerous wells and passed scattered groups of camels grazing on the dry grasses and *abal* bushes. Flowering plants were numerous, including one with tiny white petals, with a furry, grey-green leaf, which none of us could identify; also a yellow-flowering clover which smelt like mimosa. There were a great many locusts, both hoppers in the gregarious stage, and large yellow adults (solitary stage), and I captured several specimens in the glass bottle which Captain Joyce, of the Anti-Locust Commission, had given to me. Anyone travelling in the desert is usually requested to report the presence of locusts, since the agents of the Commission are thus able to track the movements, feeding and breeding grounds of these destructive insects.

Other insects we noticed, on stopping at Falaj-al-'Ali for a smoke and a cup of tea, were large black ants with white spots, a leaf-cutter bee (*Megachile*), a large black beetle of the *Rhytinota reichei* species, grasshoppers, butterflies, including a red admiral and a comma; we also saw a 'bacon beetle', common in this part of Oman, which feeds on dry carcases. The ant was unlike any species I had ever seen in the desert. It was a quarter of an inch long, with five white spots on its back (wings); a thin, elongated neck separated the head from the body, and the spidery legs were almost a quarter of an inch from the ground, giving it a curious jerky walk. Jasim said that its bite was poisonous.

Shrikes and larks (*hamra*) darted from behind the sandstone rocks as we approached, and although we looked for their nests we found

travellers had declared did not exist in Oman. There was no road and the ground was hard and very bumpy, full of holes and nullahs. Tall grasses and shrubs grew in profusion, including *shinan* and the sea-green *harm* as well as some *Hadh* bushes, indicative of recent rain or heavy dews. The yellow flowers of the *zahr* blossomed in abundance, attracting myriads of insects, whilst several hares darted ahead of our truck and scurried away into their holes. The acacia (*samr*) trees grew in thin copses and were frequently fifteen feet high, which is unusual in this part of the desert.

When we had traversed five miles of this wooded country without so much as a trace of human life, our guides became nervous and begged to be allowed to return to Djaidh. We let them go, giving them a handful of biscuits and some tobacco as a gift, but before they left us they pointed to a site some two miles ahead where, they said, the *Badu* had last encamped. When we came upon this site we did, indeed, find the remains of a camp, the grass being lighter in patches than the surrounding herbage, whilst nearby was an old well and the dead embers of a fire. But of the *Badu* there was no sign.

We sat on a hillock for a few minutes, drinking tea, while Tandy and Williamson made a survey of the land; there were no tracks to guide us and nothing to indicate where the *Badu* might have concealed themselves. Sheikh Hamid, an amusing raconteur, recounted tales of the Beni Quitab tribe. These nomads number several thousand and, split into various sections, they roam all over the Oman country; branches of this tribe are to be found in the Nejd and Kuwait, but these have separate sheikhs and do not owe allegiance to Mohammed bin Ali. They are a wild, simple people, despising both the town dwellers and those who work with their hands. They live on dates, which they mostly steal, camels' milk, fish and rice. Some of these commodities they are obliged to buy, and the money for this purpose they obtain by selling camels, animal skins, including wolves, lizard and ibex; donkeys, wild honey, cheese and gazelle meat.

The Beni Quitab are famous camel breeders and during our trip across the *Marbakh* we saw large herds of these animals with their calves. They also breed donkeys, capturing the wild asses when young, and gather wild honey from the plains. Although they do as little work as possible, they cultivate small patches of ground to which they return twice a year, growing millet and tobacco, which they smoke in tiny pipes with cane stems.